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Japan

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

Japanese Regulations for Using the Word Natural on Labels

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Report Highlights:

There are no regulations on the use of the English word "natural" on food labels in Japan, however the label should not contain anything that is misleading. If the word natural is written in Japanese, some restrictions apply.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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There are no regulations in the Japan Agricultural Standards (JAS) specifically defining what natural is. In general, the definition is based on what consumers will accept. However, for some commodities, the Quality Labeling Standard (QLS) defines how the term can be used in relation to that commodity. Specifically, for some commodities the QLS prohibits the words *shizen* or *tennen*, which mean natural in Japanese, from being used. One example is soy sauce. The standards for soy sauce say that if it is processed, which all soy sauce is, it cannot be labeled as *shizen*. This interpretation varies by commodity and does not apply to all processed foods. Currently, these regulations apply to the word in Japanese only, and so any product can have the word natural in English. As a rule, though, product labels should not contain anything misleading.

When the product is imported into Japan, there are certain labeling requirements and in the required information about ingredients, the word *shizen* or natural should not be used, since the ingredients should be listed as simply as possible, without unnecessary adjectives. So for example if natural sugar is used, the ingredients on the label should only say sugar and if the word natural is to be used it should be outside of that mandatory part of the label.

The QSL only applies to information on the product package itself, so the word natural can be written in Japanese or English on separate advertising or POP material. Even if a product bans the use of the word natural on the label in Japanese, there can be a sign right next to the product in Japanese using the word, for example it could say “This product is approved as natural by USDA”. However stores often ask for proof that the product is in fact natural before allowing such advertising, and that is at the discretion of the store.

If the use of the word natural in Japanese is to be used, MAFF recommends coming to them for a consultation first. MAFF also requires that if exporters bring in any new kind of product that has never been imported to Japan before, they should have the product documentation and packaging reviewed by MAFF.

In summary, the JAS Law allows companies to voluntarily label products as natural in Japanese or in English on foods and food ingredients, other than those specified by the Individual Quality Labeling Standards under the JAS Law.

Those products for which labeling as natural is prohibited by the Individual Quality Labeling Standards under the JAS Law are listed below:

1. Certain processed foods
 - a. Canned and bottled vegetable and fruits products
 - b. Fruit beverages, including vegetable mixed juice in which no less than 50% fruit juice is added
 - c. Soy milk, prepared soymilk and soy drink
 - d. Carrot juice, mixed carrot juice
 - e. Tomato products (tomato juice, mixed tomato juice, tomato ketchup, tomato puree etc.)
2. Processed marine foods
 - a. Dried cultured wakame seaweed
 - b. Salted cultured wakame seaweed

Note: Naturally grown wakame seaweed can be labeled as natural.
3. Seasoning
 - a. Vinegar (rice vinegar, apple vinegar, grape vinegar etc.)
 - b. Flavored seasonings
 - c. Soy sauce (except those without the use of food additives)

d. Soy bean paste

Note: Soy sauce manufactured without the use of food additives can be labeled as natural.

4. Other foods

Retortable pouched food (rice, curry etc.)